



Build a Strong Community Immunization House

A tool for communities to help ensure that their children are immunized and protected

Background

Immunization is one of the best ways that the Ministry of Health and families can protect children against many serious diseases. For the sake of Timorese children, the Ministry of Health must make safe and effective immunizations conveniently available, and parents must bring their children at the right times to places where immunization is offered.

The Ministry of Health's immunization program has become stronger in recent years. Immunizations are now offered at hospitals, community health centers, health posts, SISCa, and during outreach and campaigns. Nevertheless, too many children are still missing some or all of their vaccinations. One result is that almost 800 cases of measles occurred in the first half of 2011. If more children had been immunized, most of these cases would not have occurred.

The Role of Communities

Getting more children completely immunized and protected is a joint responsibility of The Ministry of Health and the children's families. There is also an important role that volunteers from the community can play. This makes a lot of sense, because protecting children from diseases is also a community responsibility. A community with too many children who are not protected by immunizations has an increased chance that one of the diseases prevented by vaccination – such as measles – will strike many of its children.

This document describes a tool that can help PSFs and other community members monitor how their children are doing in getting needed vaccinations. The tool can alert these community volunteers about which community children are not up to date on vaccinations, so the volunteers can motivate the parents to get those children vaccinated as soon as possible.

The Vaccination Schedule

Free vaccinations are available against many (but not all) serious childhood diseases. Some vaccines require several doses to give full protection. Others need just one dose. The Ministry of Health recommends that parents bring their children five times in the child's first year of life so that they receive all of their vaccinations before their first birthday.

When babies reach different ages, they become eligible to receive particular vaccinations. The *ideal* ages for the various vaccinations are:

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| As soon as possible after birth | » BCG (for tuberculosis) + OPV (oral polio vaccine) |
| At 6 weeks of age | » DPT-HepB (for diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus and hepatitis B) + OPV |
| At 10 weeks | » DPT-Hep B + OPV |
| At 14 weeks | » DPT-Hep B + OPV |
| At 9 months (42 weeks) | » Measles |

Children do not have to get vaccinated at exactly these ages, but parents should do their best to bring their children as soon as possible after they become eligible for each vaccination.

The Tool

The Immunization House tool is a drawing of a house. Each board in the house makes it stronger, and any missing boards or missing pieces of board weaken the house. A vaccinated child is like a solid board of the house. Vaccinating each child with all required vaccinations keeps your community's house strong. A well-built house is a safe place for your children to live.

How a Community Can Build a Strong Immunization House

The first step is for the xefi aldeia to discuss this activity with the PSF, and members of such community groups as the mothers club, youth club, and health volunteers supported by NGOs. The xefi should select 3 to 5 persons who are capable and motivated to take responsibility for the Immunization House. The CHC in your suco will invite the volunteers to attend an orientation following a SISCa to learn more about the tool.

The first task of the community volunteers is to visit every house in the community. Ask each family if they have a child under 1, and write down the name, date of birth (DOB), and sex of each child under one. Also, write down the names of mothers are expecting babies in the next few months, so you can more easily add new babies to the Immunization House as soon as they are born.

The volunteers should combine their information into one list of all of the community's children under one, listed in the order in which they were born. Most aldeias will have 20 or 30 children under one. The volunteers should bring this list to their training on the Immunization House.

At your training, each aldeia's group will receive a blank drawing of the Immunization House tool (see below). With the help of the trainers, you will write the children's names on the boards of the house.

The first board at the bottom is for the oldest child under one (the one who was born first). Write the child's name, sex, and date of birth in the correct places on his "board."

Continue by adding the second oldest infant on the next board up, and so on until the last child's board has the name of the most recent birth. Check again to be sure that each infant (children less than 12 months old) in the community has his or her board. There should be some empty boards on top with no names. You will add the names of new babies on those boards.

Above the drawing, write the name of your community and the other information. Hang this drawing in the xefi's house, the chapel, or some other place where it is protected from the rain and where people can see it.

Some health workers at the training will help you fill in the spaces that show which vaccinations your communities' children have already received. Back in your community, you need to keep filling in sections of the boards as children receive more vaccinations.

Here is how you show a child's vaccinations on his board: First take a marker and fill in the appropriate area in that child's board. To do this, find the name of the vaccination at the top of the house, then go down that column until you reach the board of that child. With the marker, fill in the piece of the board that shows that vaccine for that child. (Remember, DPT-HepB and OPV should be given three times to each baby, so each "dose" has its own piece of the child's board.) After you fill in the area, wait a minute to let the color dry, and then with a pen or pencil, write, in the same area, the date the child got that vaccination. (Try to write neatly, so others can read the dates.) Later, having the date written down will help you decide if the child is eligible for the second or third doses of those vaccines that need to be given three times each to fully protect the child -- DPT-HepB and OPV. There needs to be *at least 4 weeks* between the different doses of those vaccinations that need to be given more than once. There can be more than 4 weeks between doses of these vaccines, but not less. As soon as four weeks have passed since the last dose of the same vaccine, then the child is eligible for the next one.

Having the child's birth date written next to his or her name can help you decide if the child is old enough to receive the first DPT-HepB and OPV at 6 weeks of age and the measles vaccine at 9 months (42 weeks) of age. At your training you will learn about a weekly calendar can help you count how many weeks have passed since the child's date of birth, so you can calculate if he or she is old enough to receive different vaccines. The calendar can also help you know if at least four weeks have passed since the last dose of DPT-HepB or OPV, which means that the child should receive the next dose.

Responsibilities of Each Communities' Group of Volunteers

- Make a commitment to try to get more children in your community vaccinated and protected.
- Before the training, visit every home to make a list of all children under 1 and their birth dates.
- Attend a training workshop on how to use the tool.
- At the workshop write in the children's names, sex, and dates of birth, and fill in the vaccinations already given, with the help of the trainers.
- After the workshop, use one of several ways to learn what vaccinations young children in your community have received.
- Fill in each child's "board" in the drawing to show vaccinations received and write in the date received.
- Hang it drawing in the xefi's house, the chapel, or some other place where it is protected from the rain and where people can see it.
- Make home visits to motivate and help families whose children are behind in their vaccinations.
- Keep track of births in your community. Add the names of newborns to the Immunization House and add those children's vaccinations.
- Display and talk about the drawing when there are community events.
- Organize and facilitate a community event at the beginning of each year to retire the old drawing, introduce the new one, discuss how to get more children immunized, and recognize those children who completed their vaccinations before turning one.

Keep your House Strong

To keep your house strong, all of the children listed need to receive all of their vaccinations as soon as they are eligible. As soon as your group learns that a child has received one or more vaccinations, you can fill in the spot on the child's board that represents that vaccination. How do you find out? There are several ways, including:

- Look at each child's Lisio. You can mark the vaccinations and dates shown in the Lisio on the child's board.
- If there is a SISCa in your community, look at the vaccination register with the health worker or PSF and mark the vaccinations shown.
- When a member of your group goes to the nearest health facility, bring your drawing with you. Look at the vaccination register with the health worker and mark the vaccinations shown.

You should update your community's Vaccination House at least every two months, so you can see how your house is getting stronger and your children are getting protected against diseases.

How about new children in the community?

Each time a baby is born or an infant less than 12 months old comes to the community to live, write the child's name and date of birth on the next empty board. Fill in these children's immunizations as soon as possible. (The boards of the children who move into the community may not be in age order, but there should be few, if any, of such children.)

How about children who are behind in their vaccinations?

Look at the eligible ages for the different vaccines (see above or in a Lisio). If you notice children who are eligible to get vaccinations but who have not received them yet, visit the family. First confirm that all of the child's vaccinations are shown on the community drawing. Then urge the parents to bring the child for the missing vaccinations, which will make both the child and all the community's children safer. Tell the parents when and where their children can get vaccinated. If the family has problems, such as the need for someone to watch their other children while the mother brings the infant for immunization, help them find a solution. Ask them to inform one of the group members about any vaccinations given so you can update the drawing.

What should you do about families that don't want to or can't find a way to get their children vaccinated?

Talk to the clinic health staff about the situation. The next time they visit your aldeia, they should discuss the situation with the family.

How can you use the drawing to inform the community about how they are doing in getting their children vaccinated?

You should display and discuss the drawing whenever many members of the community come together, for example, for:

- Community celebrations
- Community meetings
- SISCa

What do you do at the end of the year?

Each December it is time to begin a new Immunization House for the next year. Some of the children from the old House will still be under one, so they should have their boards on the new House also. Check to see if any of the children who have already reached 12 months are still missing some vaccinations. In that case, urge them to have their child finish as soon as possible.

It's also a great idea to have a public ceremony in January when you "retire" the old Immunization House and introduce the new one. You can talk about how the community did last year, what strategies people use to get children vaccinated, what makes it more difficult for some families, and how everyone must work to do better this year. Some authority such as the xefi aldeia can read the names of the children who completed their vaccinations last year and congratulate the parents. If possible, these children should receive a certificate of vaccination completion at this event.

What should the volunteers do if there are problems or you are unsure about something?

If there are problems or you are unsure about something, contact the nurse or midwife who trained your group. They have received an orientation on the immunization tool, so they should be able to help you.